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Welcome to College: Incoming Students Send 23,000 E-Mail Messages, Parents Read the Homework, Students Arrive Early for Service Work

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Aug. 21, 2003
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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: For times and places for orientation activities, see the schedule or call 229-2229.)

WELCOME TO COLLEGE: INCOMING STUDENTS SEND 23,000 E-MAIL MESSAGES , PARENTS READ THE HOMEWORK, STUDENTS ARRIVE EARLY FOR SERVICE WORK

DAYTON, Ohio — The University of Dayton's orientation program began months before students stepped foot on campus.

All 1,882 first-year students logged onto the University of Dayton's innovative Virtual Orientation Web site (<http://vo.udayton.edu/>) this summer. Collectively, they spent 10 million minutes online — getting to know their roommates and other students who live in the same wing of their residence halls, posting personal profiles, buying books, even taking math and foreign language advanced placement tests.

They sent 23,400 messages to each other. "It's been staggering," said Marcus P. Robinson, the 26-year-old founder of the initiative and director for development and strategy for UD's Internet development division and Web partnership. "This is how they communicate. I'm amazed by how readily they reveal things. They jump right in and say whatever is on their minds.

"If we can only keep them this engaged," he quipped.

When first-year students arrive this weekend (Aug. 23), they'll be greeted by a comforting sight: more than 100 upperclass students clad in blue "Ask Me" shirts. "They're the blue crew," said Jolly Janson, director of educational and special programs. "They'll be driving golf carts, moving boxes up to rooms and checking IDs for keys." Classes start Tuesday, Aug. 26.

Several new programs have been added to traditional orientation weekend activities to help students get a jumpstart on their University of Dayton education.

Four seniors will talk to incoming students about high-risk drinking, alcohol poisoning and other issues in "The Real Deal on Drinking at UD." It's a mandatory program, scheduled Sunday, Aug. 24, and Monday, Aug. 25.

"They'll talk about preventing alcohol poisoning and how to respond to it. One student will challenge the expectation that you have to get wasted to fit in. Another will talk about the consequences she faced when she was caught with an open container and drinking underage," said

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Scott Markland, coordinator of alcohol and drug abuse prevention at the University of Dayton. "We are emphasizing to them that many incoming students from last year chose not to drink at all (21 percent), and, of those who did choose to drink, the majority did so moderately."

Why ask students to talk to one another?

"Students listen to their peers, particularly those who are more experienced than they are," Markland said. "They view them as legitimate, credible sources."

Approximately 85 students are arriving early to participate in a pre-orientation day of service on Friday, Aug. 22, at 10 sites around Dayton, according to Andrea Stiles, coordinator for community outreach in UD's Center for Social Concern. As a Catholic, Marianist university, the University of Dayton prizes community service. More than 60 professors have built community service opportunities into their courses.

Professors asked all incoming students — and any interested parents — to read Cass R. Sustein's *Boston Review* article, "The Daily We," which reflects on "whether the Internet is a blessing or burden for democracy," according to Patricia Johnson, associate dean for connected learning in the College of Arts and Sciences. Nearly 200 parents accessed the article online, with half expressing interest in meeting with humanities faculty on Saturday, Aug. 23, to explore the issues their children will talk about in classes this fall. It's all part of the University of Dayton's mandatory humanities base in the general education curriculum for first-year students. They read common books in English, philosophy, history and religious studies — such as James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Plato's *The Apology* — and attend the same plays, performances and speeches throughout the year.

"We want the students and their parents to understand that these classes are all connected, that we deliver general education in a unique way here," Johnson said. "We included this during orientation weekend because we want to set the tone that we're providing students with a challenging academic experience."

Finally, nearly 90 African-American and Latin American students are participating in UD Connections Aug. 20-23 to help them make a smooth transition from high school to college. The program includes academic sessions, ranging from effective study habits, time management and note-taking tips, as well as social activities. Tours will take students and their parents to visit the different services available on campus.

"The goal of UD Connections is to provide participants with the tools, resources and information needed to help prepare them academically and socially for life at UD and to take control of their education," said Monica Adkins, director of Diverse Student Populations.

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